Article

Attitudes Toward the Police in Communities Using Different Consolidation Models

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Abstract
Faced with continuing fiscal constraints, a growing number of communities have sought to provide police services in nontraditional ways. While a considerable amount of previous research explores community opinion about the police, no previous work, to our knowledge, focuses on what residents think of these nontraditional models. We surveyed residents in four communities with alternative models of policing: a merged department, two agencies that contracts for services, and a regional agency. We asked residents about their confidence in the police. We found that the type of police model was an important predictor of police confidence, controlling for other traditional measures of attitudes toward the police. We conclude with suggestions for research both on opinion regarding the police generally and among these types of communities specifically.

Police leaders and scholars have long highlighted the importance of public support for the police. As Sir Robert Peel (1829) noted "the police are the public, and the public are the police." Decker (1981) argued that, because of the reactive nature of policing, the police must have public support to achieve their goals. Still others have argued that the effective and efficient functioning of the police depends directly on the public having positive attitudes about the police (Murty, Roebuck, & Smith, 1990; Tyler, 2005; Tyler & Hao, 2002).

The police are in many ways the most public face of government service. Citizens are more likely to have regular interactions with the police than with any government workers, and the quality and perceptions of such interactions determine whether police and the public can work together (Dunham & Alpert, 1988; Greene & Decker, 1989). Having a trusted, long-term, working relationship is critical when sensational events bring increased attention and often criticism toward law enforcement (Chermak, McGarrell, & Gruenewald, 2006; Kochel, 2017; Lasley, 1994; Tuch & Weitzer, 1997, 1999, 2002). Without such a relationship, both police legitimacy and public confidence in government may suffer (Kochel, 2017).

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Police agencies do evolve, adapting to external pressures as well as cultural and social changes (Kelling & Moore, 1988). Examples of such evolution include adoption of community policing strategies, smart policing strategies, the integration and use of new technologies (e.g., body-worn cameras, less than lethal devices, and social media), and adaptation to demographic changes. Long-term changes have included implementation of community policing practices in the late 1970s and early 1980s, the adoption of problem-solving approaches and the institutionalization of the SARA model, to the adoption of intelligence-led practices (after the September 2001 terrorist attacks against the United States) that is a significant part of the transition to a homeland security era (Oliver, 2006). With the advent of predictive policing, current innovations are even more forward looking and proactive.

A somewhat different but perhaps equally significant change in policing has been occurring in reaction to economic challenges, particularly those of diminishing municipal budgets. One response to this challenge has been the shrinkage or even disbanding of police agencies (Maguire & King, 2004), with police agencies being disbanded more quickly than new ones are formed (King, 1999). The disbanding of many agencies most likely reflects a shift in how police services are delivered to communities. Police agencies in adjacent jurisdictions may merge to form a single agency. Communities may contract with their local Sheriff or another police department for police services. For example, the Los Angeles County, CA, Sheriff's Department contracts law enforcement services to 40 communities, while the King County, WA, Sheriff's Department offers contract services to nearly 20 cities and special jurisdictions.

Police consolidation is not just driven by economic forces and it is not at all new; in fact, contracting, one form of consolidation, dates back at least six decades, when the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department offered services to municipalities seeking to reduce their costs (Lloyd & Norrgard, 1966). Similarly, for decades, many law enforcement agencies have sought to share services, as technology emerges or new problems evolve that transcend communities or require more resources than a single community might be able to afford. Sometimes, these efforts have resulted in a full merger between adjacent jurisdictions or even across an entire region (Lloyd & Norrgard, 1966). Still, today, there is little research on consolidation generally and no research exploring whether different types of police models impact attitudes toward the police.

Police performance has historically been critically scrutinized, which has led organizations to adopt image management strategies. For example, most mid-sized and large police agencies have specifically assigned personnel to manage their image with public information staff (see Chermak & Weiss, 2005). One of the more contentious issues considered by communities is changing the nature of police service delivery, and there is much public debate about the pros and cons of considering alternative models. Despite evidence indicating that such models can lead to significant cost saving when they meet the specific needs and circumstance of the community (Krimmel, 1997; Wilson & Grammich, 2012; Wilson, Weiss, & Grammich, 2012), there has been no research to understand how attitudes might be impacted by different policing models. Here, we explore the impacts of contracted, merged, and regional police agencies. Thus, research on public opinion that highlights the variables predictive of satisfaction with the police and police operations in communities policed by nontraditional service delivery methods is an important gap that needs to be addressed. In addition, filling this gap provides insights into alternative ways to measure confidence as the "legitimacy of police organizations can be measured by public satisfaction with police performance" (Garcia & Cao, 2005, p. 192).

Filling this gap is also important because the number of communities making or considering changes to contracted, merged, or regional police services continues to grow. Indeed, the adoption of consolidation across the nation coupled with the budget constraints facing many communities and the tendency of communities to emulate each other suggests the number of nontraditional local policing agencies will grow for some time (Donaldson, 1995; Giblin, 2006; Mastrofski & Uchida,

1993; Suchman, 1995; Weiss, 1998; Wilson, 2006). There is little research on whether the traditional influences on attitudes toward local police agencies operate similarly for agencies organized in nontraditional ways. We are particularly interested in examining how the type of policing model relates to resident's confidence in the police, controlling for demographic and how police services are provided in those communities (see Garcia & Cuo, 2005). Accordingly, we surveyed attitudes toward the police and influences on them in communities with merged, contracted, and regional policing models.

Literature Review

Public attitudes toward the police are generally positive (Apple & O'Brien, 1983; Black, 1970; Brandl, Frank, Worden, & Bynum, 1994; Cao, Frank, & Cullen, 1996; Dean, 1980; Huang & Vaughn, 1996; Kusow, Wilson, & Martin, 1997; Thomas & Hyman, 1977; Zamble & Annesley, 1987), but such support is not consistent across all neighborhoods and demographics and may be adversely impacted by specific events, especially incidents of excessive force (Chermak et al., 2006; Kochel, 2017; Lasley, 1994; Weitzer, 2002, 2015). Local events may not only adversely impact local attitudes but, if covered sensationally, can also change national public perspectives on the police (Weitzer, 2015). That is, what may be an isolated incident is considered to represent larger problems in policing. Following incidents of excessive force in New York City, Baltimore, and Ferguson, MO, among other cities, Weitzer (2015) noted public confidence in the police was "rattled" and that such incidents ignited broader "debates on reforms." Similarly, Chermak, McGarrell, and Gruenewald (2006) examined how police officers being put on trial for attacking a citizen, penned in the media as the "Downtown Police Brawl," impacted general and specific attitudes about the police, finding that reading about the event in the media did not impact general attitudes about the police or police services but did impact what the public thought about the case and the officers. Kochel (2017) recently examined the impact of the Ferguson incident and protests on public opinion of police for MO residents. She found differential effects by race: Blacks' trust and confidence in the police significantly declined, and the opinions of White residents remained stable.

Much previous research has focused on demographic indicators of attitudes toward the police. Race is generally one of the most consistent predictors of attitudes toward the police, with Whites generally having more positive attitudes toward the police than Blacks or Hispanics have (Carter, 1985; Campbell & Schuman, 1972; Correia, Reisig, & Laurich, 1996; Furstenberg & Wellford, 1973; Garcia & Cao, 2005; Hadar & Snortum, 1975; Jacob, 1971; Reising & Parks, 2002; Scaglion & Condon, 1980; Scheider, Rowell, & Bezdikian, 2003; P. Smith & Hawkins, 1973; S. K. Smith, Steadman, Minton, & Townsend, 1999). Blacks are less supportive of the police, less likely to trust the police, and more likely to want police departments to change (Decker, 1981; Erez, 1984; Hadar & Snortum, 1975; Scaglion & Condon, 1980; P. Smith & Hawkins, 1973; Webb & Marshall, 1995; Weitzer & Tuch, 2004a, 2004b). The importance of race remains even when controlling for contextual and police satisfaction variables (Garcia & Cao, 2005).

Income may also affect attitudes toward the police (Jacob, 1971; Marenin, 1983; Scaglion & Condon, 1980) in ways that interact with race. Some research indicates higher socioeconomic residents are more likely to have positive attitudes toward the police (Webb & Marshall, 1995), but some studies indicate that higher income Blacks are much more critical of the police than middle- and lower income Blacks (Weitzer & Tuch, 2002; Wortley, Macmillan, & Hagan, 1997). Still other research finds middle-class Blacks to be significantly less concerned about differential treatment by race (Weitzer, 2000a, 2000b) and less likely to be concerned about abuse by the police (Weitzer, 1999).

Research results on other demographic indicators of attitudes toward the police have been inconsistent. Some research finds younger residents are more critical of the police (Correia et al.,

1996; Dowler, 2002; Gaines, Kappeler, & Vaughn, 1994; Hadar & Snortum, 1975; Jesilow, Meyer, & Namazzi, 1995; Kusow et al., 1997; Ren, Cao, Lovrich, & Gaffney, 2005; Scheider et al., 2003; P. Smith & Hawkins, 1973). Other studies, however, find no relationship between age and attitudes toward the police (Cao et al. 1996; Correia et al., 1996; Jacob, 1971; Kusow et al., 1997; Worrall, 1999) or that feelings about safety in their neighborhood is more important than age (Reisig & Parks, 2002). Most previous research finds gender and education have inconclusive or no effects on attitudes toward the police (Campbell & Schuman, 1972; Hadar & Snortum, 1975; Jesilow et al., 1995; Kusow et al., 1997; Murty et al., 1990; Scheider et al., 2003), but there are exceptions. Correia, Reisig, and Laurich, (1996) find that females have more negative attitudes toward the police, but Cao, Frank, and Cullen (1996) conclude that females have more positive attitudes toward the police.

Relative to research on demographic indicators of attitudes toward the police, there is less research on how police processes may affect such attitudes. Although there are exceptions (see Hawden & Ryan, 2003), research suggests that an individual's satisfaction with the police decreases as the number of the individual's contacts with the police increases (Bordua & Tift, 1971; Carter, 1985; Correia et al., 1996; Dean, 1980; Reisig & Parks, 2002). Of course, the nature, rather than the number, of citizen contacts may adversely affect individual attitudes: citizens who have involuntary contact with the police (Bordua & Tift, 1971; Bradford, Jackson, & Stanko, 2009), have negative perceptions of their contact, or have less favorable general attitudes toward the police (Tyler & Huo, 2002; Weitzer, 2015). Indeed, some scholars argue that contact and interactions with the police have a greater effect than demographic characteristics (Langan, Greenfeld, Smith, Durose, & Levin, 2001; Ren et al., 2005; Scaglion & Condon, 1980). Interestingly, Bradford, Jackson, and Stanko (2009) found that any type of contact with police had a negative impact on police effectiveness but improved attitudes about fairness and community engagement.

Several scholars have examined perceptions of what police are doing to respond to crime and perceptions of visibility influences public opinion. Beyond individual interactions with the police, Scheider, Rowell, and Bezdikian (2003) explored how community policing affected satisfaction with the police, crime prevention activities, and fear of crime (see also Zhao, Scheider, & Thurman, 2002). They found that age, race, perception of local crime threats, mobility, victimization, social disorder, fear of crime, and crime prevention behaviors influenced satisfaction with the police but so did community policing activities. Dukes, Portillos, and Moles (2009) examined attitudes toward the police in an agency that had fully implemented community policing. The citizens surveyed were satisfied with police services, relationships between variables did not change significantly over time, and feelings of safety impacted satisfaction with police services. Hawdon and Ryan (2003) explored how demographic characteristics, police visibility, contact with the police, and community policing tactics in their neighborhood related to resident satisfaction. They found that satisfaction was much more likely to be tied to visibility in a neighborhood than any interactions that might have occurred. Similarly, Sindall and Sturgis (2013) found that the number of police and visibility of the police impact confidence in the police.

Garcia and Cuo's (2005) study of public attitudes of the police in a small city focused on the impact of race/ethnicity on global and specific satisfaction with the police, but then they also studied how their specific satisfaction index differed from the global satisfaction variable. The specific satisfaction index included appearance of officers on the street, timely response, attitudes and behavior, neighborhood presence, department's community involvement, officers as role models, officers' presence in the school, use of youth court, and making the city a better place to live. They found that global and specific satisfaction with the police were influenced by similar variables, but importantly, the index of specific activities significantly influenced global satisfaction.

Our contribution is the examination of how the provision of policing with "nontraditional" police models impacts perceptions of confidence. Previous research largely focuses on attitudes toward the police in communities with what might be considered a traditional policing model—a local,

municipal department. We explore three models. First, we include a merged agency. This agency could be considered to be most like a traditional police agency in that the city remains policed by a local agency but that the agency is responsible for fulfilling the law enforcement function for two adjacent jurisdictions. Second, we include two agencies that contract for services with a Sheriff's department. In these two communities, local politicians negotiate with the Sheriff to provide a menu of different services. The Sheriff's agencies studies here provide services to many different communities. In this way, the residents living in a specific community in these areas are not connected to a local agency. Third, we include a hybrid, regional agency. In these communities, residents are either policed by what would be considered a merged agency or through a contracted agency.

Our first hypothesis that we test is that the type of police model should matter (see Sindall & Sturgis, 2013). Specifically, we anticipate that residents who are policed in the merged communities will be significantly more likely to think that the police are effective compared to residents in contracted or regional communities. Specifically, attitudes toward the police should be impacted by the way in which "police organize and execute their function" (Sindall & Sturgis, 2013, p. 139). Police officers are representatives of their community and often the identity of the community is interwoven with the identity of the police—the police represent and protect the values of the community and are part of the community (see Bradford et al., 2009; Jackson & Sunshine, 2007). Thus, this symbolic function of the police, much more than how the police functions in practice, is quite significant and something one would expect to vary when the police are not local (Bradford et al., 2009). In a merged agency, the police department is specifically linked to the identity of the community both symbolically and in practice. Yet, to date, there has not been an empirical examination of resident attitudes about the police in such communities and whether perceptions about the value of such models affect support for the police. This study fills this gap in knowledge.

We test two additional hypotheses driven by the existing literature. Our second hypothesis is that positive perceptions of contact with the police will also lead to increases in confidence in the police (see Cao, 2011; Ren et al., 2005). We test here both direct contact with the police and perceptions of police response time. Although fast response times rarely lead to arrest, the police have created an expectation of fast arrival. Negative views of police response should be exacerbated in communities policed from an outside agency, as the perception would be that they could not get to their community fast enough. Third, research has consistently highlighted the importance of race impacting attitudes toward the police. We anticipate that more than other demographic characteristics minority residents will have significantly lower confidence valuations compared to White residents.

Research Design and Method

Public Opinion Survey

To assess public attitudes and perceptions about the police in communities implementing different models of police service, we surveyed residents of three different models of police consolidation: mergers, regionalization, and contracting. Administered in 2014 and 2015, the survey included communities policed by the:

- Lakes Area Police Department, MN, a merged department that provides law enforcement services to the cities of Chisago and Lindstrom,
- City of Compton, CA, a community that contracts law enforcement services from the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department,

- City of Pontiac, MI, a community that contracts law enforcement services from the Oakland County Sheriff's Department,
- York Area Regional Police Department, PA, a hybrid regional department that merged law enforcement services for York and Windsor Townships and provides contract law enforcement services for the boroughs of Dallastown, Windsor, Jacobus, Yoe, Felton, and Red Lion.

We selected these agencies for five reasons: (1) They represent unique approaches to consolidation and highlight adversity of policing models, (2) they represent regions throughout the United States, (3) they represent a broad array of communities and agencies relative to types and sizes, (4) their consolidations were recent enough that many residents may still recall the transition to a different policing model, and (5) the chief executive from all institutions agreed to participate and assist with the study.

We examined resident perceptions of the police in these four communities, combining the two contracting agencies (Pontiac and Compton) for the analysis. Surveys were conducted under contract to the Office of Survey Research at Michigan State University. Survey interviews were completed by telephone using a Computer-Assisted Telephone Interviewing system and the CASES Version 5.5 software package designed by the University of California at Berkeley.

The target populations were adult residents at least 18 years of age in each community. The study was designed to have dual random digit dial landline and cellphone sampling frames. We also translated the instrument into Spanish to increase response rates. We sent advance letters to resident addresses to describe the survey and its objectives. The survey asked about residents' interaction with police, satisfaction with local police, impressions of local consolidation, attitudes toward their neighborhood, and demographics.

Despite considerable effort to reach eligible local residents by cell phone in all four areas, it was difficult to target cell phone numbers. This was because the geographic boundaries of a local community do not necessarily conform to the geographic distribution of cell phone numbers. This is a common problem with public opinion survey research. Given that the demographic profile of individuals reached by landline may be quite different than that for those reached by cell phone, relying on the landline-only frame for almost all completed interviews would have limited the coverage of the target populations there.

For each phone line in our sampling frame, we made at least eight attempts to complete a survey. We calculate response rates as the percentage of interviews completed among numbers identified as eligible for our sample. Response rates by community were

- 25.2% in the Lakes Area, MN, communities, with 228 surveys completed,
- 16.5% in Compton, CA, with 176 surveys completed,
- 22.8% in Pontiac, MI, with 230 surveys completed, and
- 19.2% in the York Regional, PA, communities, with 219 surveys completed.

We weighted responses to overcome any resulting biases in the resulting data as well as to adjust for demographic differences among these communities. Such weighting reflects standard practice in scientific surveys to reduce or eliminate errors of representation that are common to most surveys. These errors are associated with problems of noncoverage and nonresponse and also are associated with the particular sampling design used in a given survey, which is essentially never a simple random sample.

The weighting was done separately for each community. In each case, we used an iterative process to bring select demographic characteristics—sex, age, race, Hispanic origin, education, and marital status—within ± 7 percentage points of total population parameters. We weighted by these six demographic characteristics because they were gathered in the questionnaire for our survey and because recent statistics on them were available from the American Community Survey of the U.S. Census.

Table 1. Dependent Variables.

Measures	Mean (SD)	Min.–Max.	Loading
Police confidence			
Rate police controlling crime	2.99 (.871)	1–4	.824
Satisfaction with level of police presence	3.21 (.836)	1–4	.775
Police provide services neighborhood wants	3.27 (.806)	1–4	.810
Police solving local problems	2.90 (.912)	1–4	.797
Good job preventing crime	3.20 (.858)	1–4	.773
Trust in police	3.36 (.868)	1–4	.776
Police are friendly	3.43 (.793)	1–4	.694
Police deal fairly with people	3.24 (.961)	1–4	.696

Dependent Variables

We used the survey findings to test differences in public attitudes toward the police. Previous research has measured attitudes with a wide range of general and specific constructs (Brandl et al., 1994; Chermak, Weiss, & McGarrell, 2001; Chermak et al., 2006; Escholz, Blackwell, Gertz, & Chiricos, 2002; Frank, Brandl, Cullen, & Stichman, 1996; Garcia & Cau, 2005; Kaminski & Jefferis, 1998; Scaglion & Condon, 1980; Tuch & Weitzer, 1997; Weitzer, 2002; Weitzer & Tuch, 2005). We relied on these studies to identify questions to ask, and similar to these studies, we combined multiple constructs into a single variable for analysis.

We measured police confidence—that is, the work that the police department does in its community—through eight variables. The questions for these variables asked residents

1. How well police control crime in their neighborhood.
2. Satisfaction with level of police presence in their neighborhood.
3. Police provide services the neighborhood wants.
4. Police are able to solve local problems.
5. Police do a good job preventing crime.
6. Police can be trusted.
7. Police are friendly.
8. Police deal fairly with everyone.

All these items were coded on a 1–4 scale. Options for the first item were *poor* (1), *fair* (2), *good* (3), and *excellent* (4). Options for the second item were *very dissatisfied* (1), *somewhat dissatisfied* (2), *somewhat satisfied* (3), and *very satisfied* (4). Options for the remaining items were *strongly disagree* (1), *disagree* (2), *agree* (3), and *strongly agree* (4). See Appendix A for the measurement of the variables in the scale.

To create a single measure of confidence, these items were combined with weighted factor scoring (all loaded at .69 or above). Table 1 presents the mean, minimum, and maximum values, and each factor loading for each of the variables in our police confidence measure. Cronbach's α for these items is .90.

Independent Variables

Table 2 provides the independent variables we examined and the distribution of these variables for the residents who lived in the contracted (Compton and Pontiac), merged (Lakes Area), and regionally policed (York Area) communities. Our primary predictor variable is agency type. This variable is dummy coded with the merged agency serving as the reference category. We include a large number of demographic indicators because many have been shown to be related to attitudes

Table 2. Means (and Standard Deviations) of Independent Variables by Policing Model.

Measure	Overall Mean	Contracted	Merged	Regional
Demographic indicators				
Own home	0.84 (0.363)	0.79 (0.410)	0.94 (0.241)	0.85 (0.361)
Age	58.65 (17.29)	58.1 (17.85)	62.1 (15.55)	56.0 (17.68)
Race				
Non-White	0.37 (0.482)	0.67 (0.469)	0.04 (0.195)	0.14 (0.349)
White[a]	0.63 (0.483)	0.33 (0.469)	0.96 (0.195)	0.86 (0.349)
Male	0.45 (0.497)	0.38 (0.487)	0.46 (0.50)	0.54 (0.500)
Married/living together	0.536 (0.499)	0.43 (0.495)	0.62 (0.486)	0.65 (0.477)
Income	2.54 (1.066)	2.2 (0.969)	2.96 (1.02)	2.71 (1.09)
Education	2.98 (1.133)	2.7 (1.13)	3.30 (1.02)	3.09 (1.14)
Crime victim in past 3 months	0.05 (0.214)	0.05 (0.227)	0.03 (0.173)	0.05 (0.228)
Police contacts				
Gotten a ticket	0.04 (0.193)	0.05 (0.222)	0.02 (0.132)	0.04 (0.188)
Called 9-1-1	0.10 (0.295)	0.09 (0.292)	0.06 (0.233)	0.14 (0.349)
Police respond slowly[b]	2.16 (1.1)	2.45 (1.09)	1.7 (0.965)	2.02 (1.06)

[a]Reference category.
[b]Response categories range from *strongly agree* (1) to *strongly disagree* (4).

toward the police, and because we wanted to explore other variables, should we find a unique opinion about policing among one of our demographic groupings. Demographic variables in Table 2 are home ownership (dummy coded with renters as the reference category), age, race (dummy coded as non-White [all Black, Hispanic, and other race respondents], with White as the reference category), sex (dummy coded with female as the reference category), married/living together (dummy coded with single as the reference category), annual income (ordinal variable), and educational attainment (ordinal variable).

Across all three types of communities, our respondents were predominantly older homeowners who were married or living with a partner, most of whom had completed at least some college. Perhaps the most marked difference by community was by race; large majorities in our merged and regional communities were White while most respondents in our contract communities were not. Residents of the contract communities were also less likely to have graduated high school, to be working, or to earn more thanUS$25,000 annually. Overall, 5% of our respondents reported they or a member of their household had been a victim of a crime in the previous 3 months.

Table 2 also includes several indicators related to police work. These include whether the respondent got a ticket or called 9-1-1 in the past 3 months. We also asked respondents about police response, specifically whether they *strongly disagree* (1), *disagree* (2), *agree* (3), or *strongly agree* (4) that police respond slowly when called. Respondents in contract communities were more likely to agree that police respond slowly when called. Similar to the dependent variable, to simplify interpretation, we reverse coded this variable.

Data Analysis

To conduct the analysis and test the hypothesis, we analyzed the data using ordinary least square linear regression. The model includes all demographic, police contact, and police model type.

Findings

Table 3 provides the results from the police confidence–dependent variable. We include both the standardized and unstandardized coefficients and the standard errors. We present two models. The

Table 3. Views on Police Confidence in All Surveyed Communities.

Measure	Police Confidence–Dependent Variable			Police Confidence–Dependent Variable		
	All Residents			All Residents		
	B	β	*SE*	*B*	β	*SE*
Contracted (1 = yes)	-	-	-	−.77**	−.35	.137
Regional (1 = yes)	-	-	-	−.34**	−.13	.121
Own home (1 = yes)	−.10	.04	.117	−.19	−.08	.114
Age	.01*	.13	.003	.01*	.13	.003
Non-White (1 = yes)	−.54**	−.23	.104	−.16	−.07	.125
Male (1 = yes)	−.07	−.03	.091	−.10	. −.05	.088
Married (1 = yes)	.06	.03	.100	.06	.03	.097
Income	.06	.06	.055	.02	.02	.054
Education	.06	.06	.047	.06	.05	.056
Victimization (1 = yes)	−.58**	−.13	.184	−.65**	−.15	.179
Gotten a ticket (1 = yes)	.39	.08	.217	.43*	.09	.211
Called 9-1-1 (1 = yes)	−.19	−.05	.149	−.19	−.06	.145
Police respond slowly	−.28**	−.28	.045	−.25**	−.24	.044
Intercept	−.002		.253	.46		.264
Adjusted R^2	.243			.290		
F	14.22**			15.26**		

first includes only the demographic and police contact variables. The second model includes these variables with the police agency type variable.

In the first model, the findings are generally consistent with the existing literature. The adjusted R^2 is .24. Age, race, victimization, and attitudes of police response time were all significant. Specifically, older respondents had significantly more confidence in the police than younger respondents and non-Whites, and crime victims were significantly less confident in the police, and as concerns about police response time increased, confidence in the police decreased.

The last column in Table 3 adds the agency type variable to the demographic and police contact variables. The adjusted R^2 increases to .29. As hypothesized, residents living in communities policed by contracting or regional agencies were significantly less likely to have confidence in the police compared to residents living in communities policed by a merged agency. These differences are observed when controlling for factors frequently observed as being important predictors of attitudes toward the police.

We also tested for the impact on police performance-related variables. Calling the 9-1-1 system for assistance did not have a significant effect on perceptions of police confidence. However, opinions about police response time still mattered when adding the police-type variable. Specifically, as residents who thought that police respond slowly thought, the police were significantly less effective. Individuals who had gotten a ticket had more confidence in the police.

Finally, it is surprising that race did not have a significant effect on our measure of police confidence, as it was significant without the police type variable. That is, non-Whites were not significantly less likely to have confidence in the police compared to Whites. Similarly, owning a home, marital status, educational attainment, and income level did not have a significant effect on confidence. Two demographic variables are significant predictors of police confidence. First, older residents were more confident in the police. Second, residents who were victimized by crime were significantly less likely to have confidence in the police.

Discussion

The public has different types of experiences with the police. Individuals may experience the police directly by observing the police in their daily routines, interact with them as victims or offenders, provide the police with information, or work with them to be more involved in their community. Policing is central to the nature of community interactions and how communities solve problems. Individuals may also have vicarious experiences with the police, whether through local or distant events or even through the knowledge of the experience of a family member or acquaintance. Most types of media organizations cover crime frequently, and there is a common understanding that crime is an important news topic. News coverage focuses on serious crimes (or as at least the most serious types of crimes that occur in a community), and the presentation of events in the news closely models criminal justice case processing. As a result, news coverage focuses on the beginning stages of the system, when police behavior is particularly important. Police organizations expend considerable resources to publicly manage how they are represented, hiring full-time public information officers who are trained in impression management. They also have increasingly and aggressively developed strategies to integrate social media into their plans to tell a particular story about their agency and its work in the community. Relative to other criminal justice actors and agencies, the police have invested more in training personnel and thinking about the most strategic ways to use the media to engage the public.

These efforts are the direct result of the belief that what the police do is of interest to the public and what the public thinks about police work matters. Community policing, for example, was widely adopted because evaluations of the practice of policing highlighted a need to be concerned about public opinion of the police and to realize the potential value of motivating the public to share in the responsibility for keeping communities safe. Police departments work closely with community groups and community members with the hope of solving community problems. Such police–community interactions—whether positive or negative—impact how the public thinks about the police. Discussions of "procedural justice" emphasize the importance of engaging communities in efforts to solve crime and that the public is much more likely to engage when the police act in a way that is perceived as being fair and just (Huq, Tyler, & Schulhofer, 2011). Episodic community events, and the high levels of media publicity for such events, open larger discussions about the role of police agencies and the need to reform or change how services are provided. They may also raise questions about trust and confidence in the police that are likely to impact the public's immediate attitudes about the police (see Kochel, 2017). As a result, understanding attitudes about policing is a moving target. As police organizations evolve, public concerns and attitudes about them do so as well.

As police agencies are among the most well-known government bureaucracies, their organizational changes are likely to be highly scrutinized and discussed publicly. When a police chief leaves or is hired, when new programs are tried or disbanded, or when new strategies are implemented, there is genuine public interest in why and how such changes will affect the lives of residents. One of the most significant organizational changes that has been occurring at greater rates over the last 10 years is how policing services are provided within a community. It has become apparent that funding a police agency is an expensive endeavor and that other models might be more economical without jeopardizing the provision of services. Such changes cause widespread public concern and debate. Occasionally, a community may adopt a new model of policing only to later abandon it due to resistance of residents, community groups, or agency workers (Wilson & Grammich, 2015).

There is little research on police consolidation, and, although there has been substantial and important work on attitudes toward the police, there is no previous study that examines attitudes

toward the police where local police services have been consolidated in some way. This study looked at attitudes toward the police in communities with three different policing models: contracting with the local Sheriff, merging of two departments, and developing a regional department. We sought to understand how these different types of police models impact attitudes toward police confidence.

We did find that residents served by a merged model were significantly more likely to think the police were effective when compared to residents living in contracted or the regional communities, even when controlling for key demographic and police-related variables. The most significant difference between being a merged agency and contracted or regional agency is the localized identity of the agency. Specifically, when an agency merges, they move from being a single, local agency to a part of multiple communities, but importantly each community is represented directly by that agency. The name of the community is part of the agency, and executive staff discuss how they represent these communities and appear to be part of the communities, as they attend community meetings and are part of community initiatives. In contrast, residents living in the contracted and regional communities are given the perception that they are policed from a distance. The Sheriff's department is perceived as providing a service to the community, but they are providing such services to multiple communities and are not directly part of the community. One of the challenges of a regional agency is the square mileage that has to be covered and residents might not feel as police are available for service. The regional agency in this study is responsible for roughly 60 square miles of area, while all other agencies in the study each cover less than 20 square miles of area. Residents of the regional communities may not be as connected to how they are being policed than residents of the other areas are. Alternatively, given there are eight different communities in the regional agency, there may be significant variation not captured by our survey in whether respondents are concerned about how they are being policed. It seems, however, that residents living in these communities are more driven by operational concerns—do they police get her fast enough. In fact, as we ran independent models for each agency, the results show that response time was significant for these two communities but not the merged community.

Other findings are of interest to literature on attitudes on police. Race, for example, had no impact on confidence. Crime victims and younger residents were less likely to have confidence in the police. Although police response time has little effect on reducing crime or making arrests, it does affect how residents think about the police. When residents think that police respond slowly to calls for services, they are more likely to have confidence in the police.

This study is the first to our knowledge that has looked at attitudes about policing in communities with different local police models. The results show the importance of including a wide range of demographic variables when exploring attitudes toward the police as well as of attempting to understand what about policing in these communities matters. Although this study is valuable for what it reveals about attitudes toward policing in these communities, future research should build on what was learned here. The main concern is that community-level indicators are not included here, and it is not possible to separate agency type and community effects. In this way, this research is a first step to think through the potential issues related to the importance of identity connection with an agency. It seemed to matter here, but future research will have to explore these connections in other communities and in communities that are closely matched demographically. This study and other studies have highlighted the importance of police variables, but it is important to include many more. Respondents in these communities had strong opinions about the police, but we do not how they developed such opinions. Future research would benefit from trying to understand how residents develop their knowledge of police work, and how such knowledge affects not only how they think about the police, but how they react to the police.

Appendix A

Table A1. Means (*SD*) of Dependent Variables by Policing Model.[a]

Measure	Contracted	Merged	Regional
Police confidence			
How well police control crime in neighborhood	2.71 (.896)	3.37 (.704)	3.10 (.802)
Satisfaction with level of police presence in neighborhood	2.99 (.876)	3.52 (.675)	3.28 (.797)
Police provide services neighborhood wants	3.04 (.856)	3.58 (.587)	3.34 (.791)
Police are able to solve local problems	2.60 (.911)	3.29 (.793)	3.01 (.851)
Police do a good job preventing crime	2.98 (.926)	3.53 (.640)	3.26 (.811)
Trust the police	3.10 (.925)	3.70 (.638)	3.46 (.830)
Police are friendly	3.24 (.880)	3.69 (.552)	3.52 (.753)
Police deal fairly with people	2.97 (1.07)	3.67 (.660)	3.43 (.838)

[a]All items rated on a 1–4 scale. For question on how well police control crime, rating choices are *poor* (1), *fair* (2), *good* (3), or *excellent* (4). For question on satisfaction with level of police, rating choices are *very dissatisfied* (1), *somewhat dissatisfied* (2), *somewhat satisfied* (3), and *very satisfied* (4). For all other questions, rating choices are *strongly disagree* (1), *disagree* (2), *agree* (3), and *strongly agree* (4).
*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$.

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